

FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

Submitted by: Nevada Fire Safe Council

Finding: Funding Gap in Outreach and Education

There is a significant lack of funding for coordinated outreach and education in the Tahoe Region targeting individual property owners with messages about wildfire safety. Homeowners bear the responsibility of managing the forest on their properties and widespread behavior change is needed to reduce the threat of wildfire and protect Lake Tahoe. The lack of adequate and consistent funding for a multi-media campaign and targeted outreach supporting this behavior change is a central reason for the slow rate of defensible space implementation at Lake Tahoe. There is also confusion among property owners about how to balance erosion control practices and defensible space measures. Add to these issues the ramped-up level of fuels reduction projects occurring in the Tahoe Basin in 2008, and a recipe exists for a public backlash if ample public outreach resources are not devoted to the education effort.

Background and Supporting Evidence:

This finding and recommendation is being submitted by the NV Fire Safe Council in conjunction with the multi-agency Fire Public Information Team (Fire PIT), a subcommittee of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team. Members of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team include Basin-wide fire agencies, the Nevada Fire Safe Council, University of California Cooperative Extension, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Public opinion surveys conducted in 2005 displayed that although 90 percent of Lake Tahoe residents and homeowners surveyed rank the threat of wildfire as their number one concern for Lake Tahoe's future, respondents were confused about environmental regulations and fire safety issues. Only a fraction of the approximately 40,000 private parcels in the Tahoe Region have implemented defensible space practices. (Scientifically valid polling data is available to support this finding and recommendation and will be provided upon request.)

With 60-70 percent of parcels at Lake Tahoe owned by seasonal property owners combined with a limited local media market, public outreach costs are high and there is a significant funding gap to address this critical need.

Recommendation:

Recommendation No. 1: Create a secure source of funding for a coordinated, Basin-wide public outreach and education campaign targeting property owners to create defensible space and to foster consistent messages about fire safety and erosion control practices. The multi-faceted campaign would complement the Living with Fire program by adding additional tactics such as direct mail, publications, advertising, neighborhood outreach including demonstration events, and other community message vehicles including those reaching seasonal homeowners. The campaign would serve as the operational work plan for the Living with Fire Tahoe Coordinator (Finding and Recommendation #063) and would also address the public information requirements for fuels projects performed by fire districts/agencies throughout the Tahoe Basin over the next several years.

Impacts of Implementation:

REQUIRED analysis of impacts on the following factors:

- ☐ Cost – \$1.1 million over five years (\$225,000 per year).
- ☐ Funding source – State or federal grants, appropriations or special funds.
- ☐ Staffing – Utilize staff of the Nevada Fire Safe Council and the UNR Cooperative Extension (see F&R #063)
- ☐ Existing regulations – none.

OPTIONAL analysis of impacts:

- ☐ Operational – makes properties safer for fire fighters to protect, helps implementation of CWPPs.
- ☐ Social – positive increase in stewardship and public safety, neighbors working together to protect one another, and enhanced property values by compliance with defensible space and BMP regulations and improved landscapes.
- ☐ Political – positive.
- ☐ Policy – none.
- ☐ Health and Safety – increases protection in the WUIs, increased implementation of CWPPs.
- ☐ Environmental – creates healthier forests, reduces threat of catastrophic wildfire and enhances water quality by integrating BMPs with defensible space.
- ☐ Interagency – interagency cooperation required.